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TESTIMONY OF MENACHEM BARTEL: CHILD SURVIVOR OF THE HOLOCAUST

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PII Redacted

TESTIMONY OF MENACHEM BARTEL: CHILD SURVIVOR OF THE HOLOCAUST

I was born in Skala, Eastern Galitzia, in 1931. I was the youngest in the family. The family name was Brottschneider. I had two brothers and one sister. My oldest brothers name was Hersz, the second brother was Aron and my sister's name was Edzia. Before the war, my father was an egg seller. He worked for a large company whose center of operations was not in Skala; in Skala there was an egg collection center, and these eggs would then be sent to Tarnopol or to Lwow.

Q: He was a salesman for this company? Was it a Polish owned company?

He was a salesman for this company. I think that the owners were Jews. The company operated in Poland and it was in the export business. All of my siblings were still too young, and they did not yet go to work.

I studied in *heder* in the afternoon and, in the morning, in a Polish school. There was no high school. There was only an elementary school and everyone in the town studied there.

When the war broke out, in 1939, the Russians entered the city, and they distributed to the population all kinds of certifications, according to the person's social class. My father was given the status of a worker. Rich people were banished from the city.

Q: Can you estimate the number of Jews who lived in Skala?

I couldn't give you a number, because I really don't know. But it was not a small community - throughout the entire city center there were Jews. Poles also lived there, but not too many. There were primarily Ukrainians. The Poles, like the Jews, also lived close to the city center. The Ukrainians were farmers and they lived a little outside the city on their farms.

Q: What was the relationship between the Poles, the Ukrainians and the Jews?

The relationship was good. I was unaware of incidences of fear or clashes [between the groups]. Maybe this was because I was still a child when the war started (I was eight years old).

In 1941, the Germans arrived. During the two years that the Russians were in Skala, the Jews tried to organize themselves and to establish a community. It was known that in other places, where there were more Jews, they were able to establish Jewish schools, and so, in our city, a Jewish school was also opened. They taught, of course, the Russian language and I think also Polish, but all the studies were in Yiddish.

Q: Did you go to this school?

I went for one year to this school. It was an elementary school.

Q: What was the economic situation of your family?

I don't especially remember the economic situation, but it was not bad. I only remember that we rented one room to a Russian, who was a specialist and worked in the city.

The Jews didn't suffer, yet, they did suffer. During the Polish period the economic situation was much better, because most of the Jews were merchants. During the Russian period there was a need for the Jews to find other kinds of work. There was always the fear of selling things on the black market and sometimes the Russians randomly accused people of selling on the black market. There were already a lot of things that it was impossible to procure, and because of this the black market operated.

Q: Did you know anything about Zionist activities in Skala?

It seems to me that my brother was in some Zionist youth organization. Before the war there was some sort of club and my brother belonged to it.

In 1941 the Germans arrived and, of course, the situation deteriorated. I think that there were only a few families who fled with the Russians and went to Russia.

Q: Do you mean Jewish families?

Yes, these families fled together with the Russians before the Germans arrived. The arrival of the Germans happened very quickly. We hardly even know that there was a Russian retreat, and already the Germans were almost upon us. Perhaps, because of this reason, more people didn't flee. Also, nobody really knew what was going to happen [with the Germans].

Our city, or, more appropriately, our town, was, until 1939, a border town between Poland and Russia. The Germans, for whatever reason, guarded this border even though the Germans were on either side of the border. They didn't allow residents from either side of the river to cross over or approach closer. There was a German border patrol that lived in the city, and, in addition to this, there was a Ukrainian police force. The border patrols had a few buildings and a large amount of land. They had, for example, a pig stable. They also had horses. I don't remember if they worked the land, or not - in any event, there were two farms like this. The houses, of course, had once belonged to Jews. As a matter of fact, they had three or four houses like this, not far from one another. One, I believe, was in a place where there had once been a lumber yard which had belonged to Jews (I don't remember their name), and there they had a horse stable. There was another place with a large house, that I think also once belonged to Jews, and there they kept the pig shed. On second thought, I think that one of the places was a public building, not a

house belonging to Jews. It's possible that one of the houses had belonged to a rich Jew and had been confiscated by the Russians at the same time that this Jew was banished from the town.

Q: Did they expel all the Jews from their houses, or just some of them?

We continued to live in the same place. They took Jews to work. First of all, there was established a kind of *Judenrat*. There were three or four Jews who acted as liaisons between the Germans and the Jewish community. The main function of the *Judenrat* was that the Germans would demand that they would provide people for work detail. They took Jews for all different kinds of work - for example, to clear the road from snow. Immediately, from the very beginning, they demanded workers for the farms that they had. I don't remember whether this was voluntary or whether the community decided who would go. In any event, my big brother went to work there along with some other Jews. The same Jews worked on these farms for a long time; that is to say, they didn't switch them from day to day. I think that a few Poles also worked there.

There was no S.S. and the German authorities were not that strong; the stronger authority, ironically, was the Ukrainian police. There was no connection between the Ukrainian police and the German border patrol. The Germans who were there, I don't think they had any [direct] contact with the war. If they did, they would have been taken to the front. They were older; they were almost uninvolved with the problem of the concentration camps or the work camps.

Q: Had you already heard about these camps?

We hadn't heard about the concentration camps, but we did hear that in other cities the situation was much worse and that Jews were being deported. It was possible that these Germans in the border patrol knew the details, but, in any event, this wasn't their function. What they did do was rob. From time to time they would rob the houses of Jews. There were no longer stores that belonged to Jews, but they had already stolen merchandise from these stores or they simply stole things from the houses.

Q: Did they come with other demands to the *Judenrat*?

I don't know, I wasn't involved in the relationship between the *Judenrat* and the Germans.

Q: What did your father do during this time?

I don't remember if he was working. Most probably he worked at all sorts of jobs that were sent his way by the *Judenrat*. It's difficult for me to tell you how the Jews made a living. There was no commerce and they didn't receive a salary for their work.

Q: Did the relationship of the Poles and the Ukrainian towards the Jews change during this time?

Of course it changed - especially with the Ukrainians. They, of course, supported the German police. They were very enthusiastic about the Germans, because they had been so opposed to the Russians. The Germans promised to the Ukrainian that, in fact, they would establish a Ukrainian government. This was, it would seem, the reason why the Ukrainians supported the Germans. The Ukrainians did not steal. Mostly it was the Germans who stole. They would steal valuables and then send them back to Germany.

Q: How fearful were you in your own houses?

Of course there was great fear to be in the street when a German came by, especially a German officer. There was not so much fear of the regular German soldiers; that is to say, they didn't do anything so bad. But the Germans officers would go out with dogs, and if they saw a Jew with a beard, they would send the dog after him. Of course we were afraid of these dogs.

An important point - my brother worked in the place where there was the pig shed. He worked there, and because of him and because I was a young boy, I was able to walk around there. They had rabbits, and I would bring food to these rabbits. And there, in fact, I had food. My brother would eat there. He didn't receive food officially - but the extra food from the German kitchen would be given to the workers. Most of the time I was to be found there; I walked around the town quite freely - that is to say, without fear.

We had already heard that in other cities there were pogroms, and the Jews knew that, in fact, it could happen in Skala. I don't know how serious the Jews took this threat, but it appears they knew it could happen sometime soon - that it would happen in our town - because sometime before the pogrom did occur, a Jewish patrol, of sorts, was established; that is to say, there was a night watch.

Q: Was this an official duty?

Not official, but on every street there needed to be one person who would walk around so that, in case something was happening, he would be able to alert us.

Q: Who organized this?

I think the Jews organized themselves. Despite this patrol, however, the first pogrom came. It is interesting how it came to be that the Jews knew there was to be a pogrom. The Germans for whom the Jews worked (the border patrol) - one of them came to us in the middle of the night; he knocked on the door and he asked for my brother (the one who worked for them), and he said to him that something was not right at work and that he should come to the farm immediately. There was another Jew who also worked for the Germans and he lived outside of the town, about two kilometers away. A German also was sent to his house to tell him to come to work immediately, even though it was the middle of the night. We knew that something wasn't right.

I remember that we all got up, and immediately the Jew who was on guard duty in the area came to ask what was going on. We told him that someone had come to ask my brother to come immediately to work, and that he needed to see what was going on. Almost immediately, this became known throughout the whole town. It seems to me that the information was passed from street to street. As for the Jew who lived outside the city, his in-laws lived in the city, and he came to their house and said: "You see, they came and asked for me to come. Something is not right, you need to be careful." Only after delivering this message did he go to the farm. It was already close to sunrise. Morning came, and I still remember that I said I would go together with my brother, and then I would then return to tell everyone what was going on. At the beginning, in fact, we were most worried about my brother's well-being. In the end, my parents didn't allow me to go, but my brother went to the farm.

As my brother approached the farm, he passed the house that was, in fact, the headquarters of the Germans. It was also the house that had the dining room for the Germans. But this house was not part of the farm. In order to get to the farm, he needed to go another couple hundred meters. In front of the headquarters, there was always stationed a German guard. I think that on the way my brother met the second Jew who worked there, and when they approached the German guard they suddenly saw that a private car was also approaching and that a German was getting out of the car. My brother or the other Jew said: "I think that Schultz is returning from his vacation." Schultz was one of the Germans who worked there, and I think that he was on vacation and was supposed to return. My brother and the other Jew thought that they would go and help him with his luggage, but the German who was guarding outside said to them: "Don't go to the farm where you work; climb up here into the attic." This was the same house that was the headquarters. They went inside this house that was the German headquarters, and [this German guard] helped them go up into the attic and told them not to come down.

In fact, in the taxi that was arriving were the vanguard soldiers, since immediately afterwards there arrived more trucks with soldiers armed with rifles.. The truck traveled slowly down the street, and the soldiers jumped from the vehicles and assumed positions in the streets, across from the Jewish houses. Everyone ran to find the hiding places in their houses that had been prepared ahead of time in case something would happen. We had a cellar outside the house, and also a cellar inside the house, in the corridor, and it was possible to conceal this inside cellar from above. We closed the exits to the cellar - we camouflaged it like this - that it was impossible to know that there was a cellar. Two families lived in the same house. The corridor connected the families and from there it was possible to go down into the cellar. We didn't think a lot but immediately we went down into the cellar. Our neighbor, and my second brother stayed above. This neighbor also had a father, who lived in some village, but he had come to live with him during this German period. They stayed above in order to camouflage the cellar with the rug. It was a wooden floor and the door to the cellar was also wood, and it was necessary to cover the wood with a rug so that the cellar wouldn't be seen. They stayed, thinking they would

climb up in the attic and find a hiding place either on the roof or in the attic. I think that my brother found a hiding place in the house, between two curtains - the walls were very thick and there were double windows because of the cold. It wasn't all that long before we heard shouts outside and knocking on the door: "Jews, open the door!" And, of course, when they burst inside they, at first, didn't find anyone. They literally were running right on top of our heads. We heard them go up to the attic and they caught the neighbor and his father and took them outside.

My brother was saved - that is, not the one who was in the German headquarters, but, rather, the one who hid behind the curtains. I don't remember all the details. In any event, the pogrom continued for an entire day. It was a Sunday, or maybe it wasn't a Sunday - in any event, it was a [Jewish] holiday or just before a holiday. How do I remember this? Because there was food that was prepared for a couple of days. I also remember my brother lowering us food in the cellar. We heard them enter the house every so often. They searched, they opened closets, and then there would be quiet.

Because there were no windows, we sat in the cellar without any air. On the first night we opened the door to the cellar and lifted our heads out a little in order to see and hear what was going on. I think that my brother joined us that night. He lowered himself into the cellar and I think he even told us that he had seen the Ukrainians standing in the street and watching as the Germans were gathering together all the Jews - they didn't kill anyone on the spot, but they gathered all the Jews together in a place that had once been a Polish military camp, and was also a public building with a large courtyard. From there they were taken away in trucks.

Q: Only the men, or everyone?

Men, women and children. It started in the early morning and continued for an entire day. I don't know if they took the Jews away on the same evening or on the next day, but, in any event, we stayed in the cellar a while longer. On the next day we were still afraid, but since we didn't hear any noise, we decided to come out of the cellar.

Towards evening, I left the house in order to know the fate of my big brother. I ran - it was already getting dark- so that the *goyim* (non-Jews) wouldn't see me. I ran straight to the farm. When I arrived, I asked a Ukrainian or a Polish woman if she had seen my brother. She said: "I haven't seen him at all." I walked around the field and I called his name, but he didn't answer. I went to the other farm, but he wasn't there either. I returned home. When it became dark, my brother did return home, and he explained to us that, in fact, he was hiding in another house - in the house of the German headquarters. The people there didn't want them to leave until it became dark; the reason for this was so it would not become known that they, in essence, had saved Jews.

Q: Did those Germans really save these two Jews intentionally?

They did save them intentionally.

Q: What was the reason?

They worked for them and they were happy with their work, and, it seems like they wanted them to continue to work for them. They must have known that, in any event, other Jews would still be around, so perhaps they decided that they would specifically save these two Jews.

Frequently the Germans also received fairly big gifts from us. [They were given] things made of gold - someone who travelled on vacation was perhaps able to give this as a gift to his wife. Thus, these Germans acted fairly well to the workers.

Q: Where did they bring the Jews whom they had gathered in the courtyard?

Afterwards we heard that they brought them to a place near Lwow, where there was a work camp. I don't think that any of them returned home.

Q: How many Jews were taken, approximately?

Many - at least 80% of all the Jews.

Q: Did they also kill Jews on the spot during the pogrom?

I don't recall that they killed Jews. The entire pogrom was centered around gathering the Jews and then transporting them. There were shots, of course, and beatings, but there were no killings during the pogrom.

Q: Do you know what year it was? Was it the same year that the Germans arrived?

No, it was not the same year. I know this because my brother worked for the Germans for a long time, or maybe it only seems to me like a long time. In any event, it is hard for me to say, but it happened sometime after they arrived. It didn't happen immediately.

After the pogrom, orders were given for the expulsion of all the remaining Jews. I don't remember if it was immediately afterwards, or whether a few months passed. In any event, I remember that the Jews traveled in wagons with horses - there were no buses - and I remember seeing wagons loaded up with everything. They went to Borszczow. The expulsion order stipulated that anyone who remained in Skala would be killed.

Q: What was the distance to Borszczow?

30 or 40 kilometers.

Q: Was there a ghetto there?

Afterwards, we heard that they concentrated all the Jews on two streets, so it was like a ghetto. Also, any Jews who already lived in the area were made to live on these two streets.

Q: Why did [they] go specifically to Borszczow?

The Germans directed us to go there. That is to say, they said that it was permitted to live there, or that it was necessary to go to such and such a city. It seems that this was again a trick of theirs: to concentrate all the Jews in one place instead of beginning to search for remnants of Jews here and there.

There were some Jews who decided to remain, who tried to hide with the non-Jews, with the Ukrainians. Not too many stayed with the Ukrainians. There were also those who went into the forest. They lived in the forest in bunkers that they built themselves.

Because my brother continued to work for the Germans, we tried to see if they would allow the families of the Jews who worked for them to also remain. They had a lot of workers, not only my brother and the other Jew (whose name I don't recall). There were a lot of Jewish families who worked there, and they continued to work there even after the pogrom. Because they continued to work there, we hoped that we would also be able to stay. Finally they told us: " Okay, you can remain". - in other words, they gave us permission to stay in Skala. As concerned the Ukrainian police, who were responsible for patrolling the non-Jews, they left the Jews who worked for the Germans alone -that is to say, they saw the Jews as being somewhat protected by the Germans. The arrangement to allow the families to stay didn't last very long. In the end, they told us that, despite the previous arrangement, they would only be able to keep the people who worked for them, and that they wouldn't be able to allow the families to remain.

Q: What was your brother's work?

My brother and the other Jew worked in the pig shed. They worked together with an old, experienced Polish worker (the Jews were not experienced in this type of work), and there was also a Ukrainian woman who worked there. Of course there were other Ukrainians and Poles who worked there as servants, keeping the house and other things.

Q: So you went to Borszczow?

I didn't go to Borszczow. We decided that since my brother was, in fact, able to walk around freely in the town, because of him I would also able to go around freely. That is to say, I tried to do this. If I saw a Ukrainian policeman, I tried not to be in front of him and not to meet him. But I wasn't afraid of the non-Jews. Everyone knew that we worked for the Germans. I was even able to go to the market to buy things. So, we decided that the family would stay in the town, because we knew that in Borszczow the same thing would certainly happen as had happened in Skala. In Skala, since there were no longer any Jews,

it was possible that there wouldn't be anymore pogroms. We also thought that we would have better a chance of surviving with the Ukrainians [and the German border patrol].

The family stayed inside the town, not in a real hiding place, but living in an abandoned house. There were lots of abandoned houses. I was to be the contact person. My brother would also come to check on the family, but I would come more frequently, especially in the evenings. I would buy things, and then, so as not to arouse suspicion, I would take what I had bought to the work place of the Germans. In the evening I would bring what I had bought to my family.

Q: Do you mean to say that the others didn't leave the house at all?

They didn't walk around at all. As far as the Germans knew, they were not even in the town.

I remember there being other Jews in hiding, and I remember that more than once I would hear shots, and immediately I would run to the rooftops to see what was happening. Sometimes it would be the Ukrainian police doing searches, either because someone had informed on the Jews or they took it upon themselves to do a search. They would kill whoever they would find; they would bring them out to be killed.

I once ran into two policemen who were riding on bicycles and I ducked into a side street. I saw that they were coming after me, so I started to run away. I came to a place that it was impossible for bicycles to enter - that is to say, the policemen would need to get off their bicycles to run after me. They did run after me, and I went into an abandoned Jewish house. I went inside and it was a one level house. That is to say, there was one level where the entrance was, but, once inside, I saw that the outside yard was lower than this level. I didn't think about this, whether it was lower or not lower, but I simply jumped from the window. It was very high up, but nothing happened to me. I got up and continued to run. There were some Ukrainians who lived next door. After the war they told me that they had seen me jump, and they thought to themselves: "How is it possible? How could he jump from a place like that! He certainly was either killed or maimed!" They remembered that I ran away. I didn't think so much about what I was doing, but, in fact, I wasn't so afraid. I knew that even if they would catch me, I would say that I worked for the Germans and they would probably free me because of this. If not, I had the feeling that the Germans themselves would free me. My brother would talk with one of the guards or with someone else [in a position of authority].

Q: These were Ukrainian policemen?

The policemen were Ukrainian. In any event, I ran away from them and in the end I arrived safely at the work place.

In the abandoned house was my father, my mother, my sister and Aron, my other brother. Aron also tried to work for the Germans. When they needed someone to work he would

ask the *Judenrat* to arrange something for him. There was, in fact, a period when he did work for the Germans, but afterwards they reduced the number of workers and kept only the permanent workers. Aron caught typhus and was sick. He was kept in bed with a high fever. Of course it was impossible to call for a doctor.

Q: Were there any medications?

I was able to buy some medication in the pharmacy, but I don't remember if I specifically went to buy medication when Aron was sick. In any event, during this whole period, when it was necessary, I did go to the pharmacy and bought medication. The owner of the pharmacy was a Pole and he was very friendly to the Jews. I think that, at one time, the pharmacy had belonged to a Jew or at least there was a partnership with a Jew. I think that this Jew was taken away during the pogrom. In any event, this Pole stayed with the pharmacy, and he acted very good to the Jews. For example, if someone came to buy something, he didn't inform the authorities that he had seen a Jew.

The real danger was from the Ukrainians, because they would inform on us. Those most in danger were the Jews who had earlier given their property to the Ukrainians. Many Ukrainians had come to the Jews and had suggested to them: "You see? There are robbers all around. I can watch your things. We are old acquaintances. You can leave everything with us." And many Jews made this mistake. They gave things to the Ukrainians to watch, and afterwards the Ukrainians made sure that these Jews would be taken and killed. They would go around and inform on them.

I would go to the abandoned house and I would bring food to my family. I also became sick with typhus. Apparently, I caught it from my brother. My parents decided that I should also stay in the house until I recuperated. I rested for one or two days, although I was still feeling pretty good. It was during this time that there was a knock on the back door, the door that we used. One of the Ukrainians, a non-Jew was knocking. I don't remember his name, but I knew him and where he lived. My father or mother looked out of the window to see who was knocking, and they saw this Ukrainian, along with a Ukrainian policeman who was hiding behind him. There was panic, and without thinking too much, we knew that we needed to escape. In these types of situations, I think that everyone was like a stone - it's difficult to describe this, that people don't think about what is going to happen to the others - everyone runs as if he is all alone. My father gave the directive: "Run from here, and we will meet by the house of a certain non-Jew." We always knew that if something would happen, we would run a little outside the city to the orchard of a non-Jew who we knew, but to do so in a way that the non-Jew wouldn't see us. So, we knew where to run and where we would meet. We ran in the direction of this orchard. I remember that I jumped out of the window.

Q: Was this during the day or the night?

This was during the day. It was a market day. The policeman ran to the front door and began to shoot after us, and all the people in the marketplace ran to see what had

happened. I didn't see any of this, but somebody told us afterwards. My mother purposely ran in a different direction and she was caught. It think it was the same Ukrainian who caught her and maybe some other Ukrainians, as well. She had some gold coins, Russian money that we kept in the event we needed to either buy food or otherwise to survive. Someone told us that she was begging: "Take this money and let me run away before the policeman gets here!" My sister was shot and killed by the gunfire of the policeman. My father and I managed to run away. We immediately ran into a narrow street and from there we turned right such that [the Ukrainian] was no longer able to see us. We were then able to escape by running between the houses.

My mother's fate was that the policeman killed her. We also only knew this from accounts that we heard. I didn't see it and no one else in the family saw it. We didn't see the bodies of either my sister or my mother.

My brother, who was sick, never left his bed. They didn't go inside the house, because they thought that everyone had run away. Also, there was only one policeman. My brother explained afterwards that he heard the sounds of gunshot and he didn't know what had happened, but he saw that no one else was around. So, he got up, he managed to go a few meters from the house and he lay down in a corn field. At one point, a Ukrainian saw him and said to him: "Look, the police were here, get away from here." Similarly, a German passed by him. My brother recognized him as one of the Germans we worked for. This German saw my brother and stared at him. He may have even said something to him, but that was all he did and then he continued on. In the evening my brother arrived at our meeting place. We met at the same place as we always did, at the orchard of a certain non-Jewish family. We met there without their knowledge; they had no idea that we were specifically meeting there. But, in any event, we saw them as more than just acquaintances. They knew our family very well, and we thought that at least they wouldn't inform on us. The three of us met there.

In the evening my oldest brother, the one who worked for the Germans, arrived. He came to see if any of us had survived. He also didn't know what we would do. He thought together with my father, and they decided that my father and my sick brother would hide in one of the empty houses that was behind the row of houses that the Germans used. That is to say, the Germans didn't use that particular house. On the bottom of this house lived a Ukrainian, a young boy who worked for the Germans. I believe that he worked as a coachman or took care of the horses. [Apart from this boy] the house was abandoned, so my brother decided that he could keep the two of them in the attic, and nobody would suspect that they were there. And so, that evening, we all went to this house and climbed up into the attic. My sick brother and my father stayed there. Even though I had gotten healthy very quickly, my brother was still sick, and it was difficult to take him to this place. But my oldest brother, Hersz, helped him, and he was able to lay there in the attic along with my father. I joined my older brother at the place where he worked, and we planned to bring them food. I never did go to this house. I don't even remember exactly where the place was. My big brother would go there himself., since it was close to the place where we worked.

And so we continued to work with the Germans, but only for a little while longer. On one clear day they came to the farm where we worked, and they told all the Jewish workers that we should go to the second farm because something there needed to be helped with. I remember that I went with my brother and with some other Jews who worked with us to the second farm. When we got there, a German soldier was standing inside the gates and didn't let us come into the courtyard. There they gathered together all the workers from the two farms, in order to deport them to another city. I still don't know what their fate was. They were deported to another city, but I don't think they were brought there to be killed. I don't think the purpose of this deportation was in order to kill them. It was explained to me afterwards that they took them to Czortkow, which was a larger city, or to Lwow. Afterwards I was told that they were taken to a work camp in Lwow. These were just rumors and I don't know if it they were reliable.

Q: They took everyone?

They took everyone. I still had not gone inside the courtyard. Germans were guarding both inside and outside. The Jews were instinctively cautious. Of course, we never expected the Germans would be so good that they would protect until the end of the war.

There were two possible places to hide. One of these places was built especially for this purpose by the [Jewish] workers. It was a bunker, of sorts. The other place was a loft. I don't think that the bunker was completed because those of us who came from the other farm (in a minute I will tell you who this included) climbed up into the loft. In any event, I remember that my brother said to me: "You will climb up together with this family." He was referring to the Jew who worked with my brother - the one who lived outside the city and who I mentioned earlier. This man's name was Yegendorf. I'm not sure how, but he was there together with his wife and his daughter. I can't explain this, and I'm not sure how this happened. It seems that his wife and his daughter were already hiding in the loft and he and I joined them. I also remember that my brother said to me: "You will climb up into the attic; afterwards I will take the ladder to the side." He also gave me a gold chain and said: "Whatever happens, happens. It's possible that we won't meet...I am going to try to run away over by climbing over the wall." It seemed, however, that some others who tried climbing the wall were being caught by Germans who were guarding the wall. He continued: "I will try to run away or to hide someplace else, but you will go up into the loft with them."

Q: And what about your father?

My father never left the place he was hiding in. The Germans didn't take him because they didn't know where he was.

I went up into the loft with the Yegendorfs. I don't know if my brother went into the bunker or didn't go into the bunker, but, in any event, the bunker was discovered and the people were taken out and deported.

That bunker - know I remember - I think that some of the workers who worked in the yard [of the second farm] kept their families in there. It seems that they were hiding there all along. The Yegendorfs were one of the families that was hiding there. I don't remember if they were already in the loft or if they went up with me. In any event, we went up and we lay there, above the horse stable. We were able to hear how they were gathering everyone together and bringing them outside.

Towards evening, everything calmed down and there was quiet. When it was totally quiet, in the night, we began to come down slowly. We crept out the back door; we came down from the loft, we crept outside and we ran. There was another girl there, I don't remember her name, who was also hiding together with us.

We left. I was still a young boy and I didn't know what to do. I didn't know if they had taken my brother, or if he was able to run away. In any event, I intented to go to the same place where we always met, the orchard, and maybe I would be able to find my brother there.

Yegendorf, his wife and his daughter, this was the entire family, they ran to someplace else, and I didn't see them again until the end of the war. The entire family was saved and were kept alive by Ukrainians, I think. I don't know if this was in the same city or in a different city.

Together with the girl, I climbed into some attic in the middle of the city. We remained there until it was nearly the morning. We needed to plan where we would run to, but we had no definite plans. She had some Polish or Ukrainian acquaintances, and she thought that maybe she would go to them and be saved. In any case, I wanted to get to the place where we always met, the orchard of the Ukrainian. I don't know why I didn't do this immediately during the night. Maybe because I was afraid to go alone, and so I waited until the morning. In the morning, I tried to run to there, but so that nobody would see me. While it was still quiet and I didn't see anyone outside, I ran to the orchard.

When I got there, I met my father and Aron, the youngest of my two brothers. While they had been hiding, in that empty house behind where the Germans lived, they saw what was happening and they decided that when it would be dark they would run away from there and return to the orchard. And this is how I met them. My oldest brother wasn't there. Evidently he was deported, but we didn't know to where. We really did not have any connection with the outside world. We were not able to go to the Ukrainians and ask, and we had no connection with anyone else.

We hid at the house of a Ukrainian, someone who my father had either given a little money to, or had promised that he would give him money. My father also gave him my sister's leather coat, and he hid us. I don't remember his name. We hid in the hay loft. We slept on the hay and stayed in his fields and not in his house. The Ukrainians themselves were terribly afraid to keep people, because they had been threatened that

whoever hid a Jew, his farm would be set on fire. This Ukrainian agreed, for whatever reason, [to hide us] and occasionally he would bring us food.

I remember that I once went, in the evening, with the gold chain that I had been given, to the pharmacy. The pharmacy was outside the city and I had to go a roundabout way so that I wouldn't be seen. I went into the pharmacy before they closed, towards the evening. I went there in order to sell [the chain]. This pharmacist was, in fact, the only person who was able to buy things. He was a property owner and he was interested in buying things. I was not able to simply go to any non-Jew and offer him the chain. I also assumed that he would not inform on me, but, of course, I tried not to tell him that I was together with my father and with my brother, or to tell him where we were [staying]. I also tried, of course, to leave [the pharmacy] by a different route, not in the direction that led to where we were staying. I sold him [the chain] - he weighed it - and he gave me whatever he gave me, I don't know the price. In any event, he gave us an amount of money that allowed us to buy bread for sometime afterwards.

I would go to a different Ukrainian family, not the ones where we stayed, to buy bread. There, everyone baked bread for himself. I asked them to bake me eight to 10 loaves of bread, and I would come with a bag, take them and pay for them. They didn't inform on me. Of course, I was always careful and they were careful that I wouldn't be seen. The food was, in fact, bread with onions, or dry bread with salt. And sometimes, infrequently, this non-Jew would give us some soup.

I think that we remained there a few months.

Q: During what period was this?

It was just at the beginning of the winter, and afterwards it was really winter. One day, it seems, they informed on us and the Ukrainian police came. We saw him entering through the gate and immediately he began to search. We ran out the back way before he was able to get to us. We ran to another farm, some three or four houses from there. It was a place where I think my parents had once lived, and the non-Jews who lived there knew my family well. Many times we had hid in their fields. We ran to there and we went inside the cow stables. I was almost naked, as I only had on a shawl. I ran barefoot and the snow was up to my knees. We didn't have time to get dressed. We still had clothes, but, at the time, we were laying down, and for whatever reason, I had taken off my clothes. The shawl was also something we had bought from these same non-Jews [that we bought the bread]. They would make it themselves from a sort of thick linen. Our clothes were already tattered.

In the cow shed, me and my brother climbed up into the loft, and my father said that he would continue to run across the road to another place. I don't know why he did this, either because he wanted to lift us up to the loft and then to take the ladder away, or so that they [the Ukrainian police] wouldn't know that we had run to this place. In any event,

he ran to another place, across the road, also not so far away. The police didn't find us, and they went - it was only one policeman.

After the policeman went, the grandson of the Ukrainian woman who lived there discovered us. I think that the husband of this Ukrainian woman had already died, and she was already old. The grandson came and discovered us in the loft, and he said to us: "Get out of here, I don't want any problems." We were not very suspicious of him, even though we were very afraid of him. His father had been one of the fanatical Ukrainians, and he was known as a nationalist. I think that they killed his father or his brother and they were full of hate. I said to him: "Look, I can't go like this." He brought me pants. He brought me rags for my legs - or maybe he didn't bring - I really don't remember. We didn't have a choice, so we ran back to the same place. I remember that he watched the direction we ran to.

My father didn't return. We waited for him to return to that place. In the meantime, we saw that the Ukrainian grandchild had watched the direction we ran to, and we saw him go towards the city. After some time, the police returned to search for us. It seems that the Ukrainian did inform on us. In the meantime, we didn't stay in the same place, but we climbed up even higher in the loft. It was a sort of granary. On either side there was straw and the middle was open. It was necessary to climb up a ladder. This ladder was off to the side, not in the same place that we climbed up. We removed a bundle of hay and we lay down there. The policeman came and searched. He climbed up the other side, and I was sure that he would see us, but we lay there without making any movement. He didn't see us and he went away.

The policeman left and started to go back to the city. When he went outside, we suddenly heard shots. It seems that, at that exact moment, my father, not knowing that there was a policeman there, had tried to return to the granary. [Earlier, when we were hiding in the cow shed, my father had run to another place across the road.] However, [the family that lived there] didn't want to keep him. They said to him: "Go! Get out of here!" He said, "Wait for it to get dark and then I will go." They didn't agree. It was almost evening then, it was already a little dark, and it seems that he was trying to cross the road [when the policeman saw him]. It seems that the policeman first fired into the air and didn't kill him. My father then tried to run away. In any event, the policeman caught him and brought him to the police station.

My brother and I decided to stay there. In the evening, I heard someone coming and shouting, "Aron, Aron" with a Jewish accent. I thought it was my father, and we got up to answer. In fact it was the non-Jew who lived there. He knew how to speak Yiddish well, and he said to us: "Look, I don't want to know anything. Go from here! I don't want problems with the police! You have to leave here!" We said to him, "Ok, we will go."

This was in the evening, it was dark, and we didn't know where to turn. We decided to return closer to the city and again to go into some abandoned house, into the attic, and to remain there.

Before we left we asked about our father, and he told us that the police had taken him. My father was taken by the Ukrainians to be killed in the Jewish cemetery - we know this because at the end of the war we met a Jewish survivor who had been in the same jail with my father, and he explained that they had taken the two of them to the cemetery in order to kill them. He managed to escape; they shot after him, and my father was killed there.

We continued, me and my middle brother, the one who was next oldest to me. We stayed in an abandoned house, and I remember that in the evening I went to search for food. That is to say, I truly went from house to house. I had a tablecloth, some sort of handiwork, I think. I went and I offered this as compensation for a loaf of bread. Most of the non-Jews knew who I was. Finally, in one place, they gave me, I think, half a loaf of bread. This was already during the period that the Germans were retreating from the Russians. It was the winter of 1944. We lived in this attic and literally ate snow. I think that both of us were already bloated from hunger and from the cold. We didn't have shoes and we only had rags on our legs.

Things were not normal at that time. There was no longer a market day. There was already a [German] retreat, and I remember that we saw the Hungarian army. They had different uniforms that were sort of green. We saw the Hungarian army, in retreat, passing by there. They stationed themselves in the market and there they cooked food. They came to the house in which we were staying in order to take the doors and the windows and to use them for [kindling] wood.

They came to the house. I don't remember if they found us, or if we were afraid that they would find us and we wouldn't be able to run away, so, as they approached the house, we ran away. They ran after us. I ran into an abandoned house and, again, only by climbing up the destroyed walls was I able to climb to the attic. There were no steps going to the attic. My brother continued running and he entered the yard of one of the non-Jews whom we knew and whose sons I knew. They ran after him and they caught him. I don't exactly know what his fate was. There were those who said that they turned him over to the Ukrainian police; there were others who said they took him with them; there were still others who said that they stabbed him with a knife right in the middle of the street. I don't exactly know what his fate was.

I remained in the attic, and in the evening a Ukrainian or Polish boy climbed up in the attic in order to take some wood home. He climbed up and he saw me. We had been friends. We went together to school. I remember that I knew his name, and when I saw him come up, I called to him and said to him: " Be quiet and don't tell anyone! Promise me that you won't tell anyone at home." I was afraid because he had a brother, also a murderer. I think that his brother had helped to capture my brother. I said to him: "Don't tell anyone. I'm leaving here." He promised me that he wouldn't say anything, but I assumed that he

would go home and immediately tell people. So, the moment that he went down from the attic, I went down after him and I ran away.

I ran away and I began to wonder from farm to farm of non-Jews who I knew. In fact, all of them knew me. The reason for this was my father was an egg seller, and he would collect eggs from them and everyone knew us. I also went to school with a lot of them. This was during the time that the Germans were retreating. I walked around and I stole food. I would take fresh eggs from the chicken coops and I would drink them. But I would also go into the houses, and I was received in a very different way. The people were no longer scared. They no longer said to me: "You are not a non-Jew, they will capture you." I remember that in one place they even made me a meal. I was so hungry, but, because they had prepared me a heavy meal, I wasn't able to eat anything. I had one or two spoonfuls and I couldn't eat, and they said to me: "How is it possible? You are so hungry, yet you don't eat?" They also said to me: "After you eat, go from here, don't stay here." I promised them I would go, and in the night I went into their hayloft and I tried to stay there. I was there all night long, and in the morning I left, so that they wouldn't even know I had been there (although the next day they told me that they knew I was there). I was very afraid. Despite the retreat of the Germans, we would often hear shootings. Also, the Germans who were retreating would wander around the farms; they took straw for their [military] posts, food, turkeys, etc.

I wasn't so afraid of them. One time I was even caught by the Germans, and they asked the Ukrainians: "Who is this?" And they said: "A Jew." I remember that they brought me to those Germans in the city who we once worked for. They brought me to a place that we had never been to before, a house where the higher ranking German officers lived. When they brought me there, a certain non-Jew who worked there as a cook looked at me and said: "Oh, are you still living?" Because I had told them that I had worked for the Germans, a German chef who knew me well came forward. This chef spoke Polish not badly, as he was from Silesia. He said, "Okay, leave him here," and afterwards he said to me: "Go, run away from here!" He allowed me to escape and I left.

I didn't have anyplace else to hide. Sometimes I entered into non-Jewish houses, and once they even gave me a little vodka to drink, saying: "Warm up a little bit, this will help." I had an intestinal ailment, so I told them that I wasn't able to eat. The people now acted towards me in a very different way. I was not longer afraid that they would inform on me.

I met in the field some of the children with whom I had once studied, and they invited me to come inside. Of course I was afraid, because Germans were crawling around everywhere. I couldn't go into the houses of these non-Jews because frequently the Germans would come to these houses, sleep there and eat there, and they would see immediately that I wasn't one of them - that I wasn't a non-Jew. I was dressed differently, my hair was not cut, I was dressed in rags, and also, it seems that I looked swollen from [lack of] food. These Germans were always asking: "Who is this?" But they no longer did anything to me, so I was not afraid of them. I was more afraid of the Ukrainians, themselves. I wandered around like this until the Russians arrived.

I don't exactly remember - I'm not even talking about the date - I don't even remember what was happening when the Russians arrived.

Q: Was this still during the winter?

No, the snow had already melted. It was already after the winter had passed. In any event, the Russians arrived, and slowly Jews came back and gathered together in the town. All together there remained only about 80 [Jewish] people - refugees. I met the Yegendorf family, and, in fact, I stayed together with them, that is to say, I lived with them. During this period, we benefited from Russian rule, but we didn't stay in Skala for a long time, because they allowed us to travel within Poland, to Bytom. I traveled together with the Yegendorfs. Most of the Jews traveled from Skala. We were also afraid of the Ukrainians. Our fear was very great. We were afraid that they would want still to avenge themselves on us in order that there would be no one to tell [what they had done]. I think that all the Jews left, and we went to Bytom, which was in Silesia.

In Bytom I stayed with [the Yegendorfs] for a short time. In Bytom, the Jews began to organize themselves. There were emissaries from Israel. There was *HaShomer HaTzair* and other movements.

I remember that one day someone turned to me and said, "Is that you, Brottschneider? Since you are an orphan, there is now being organized an *Aliyat HaNo'ar* (Youth Immigration) of orphans to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel)." He told me that I should come and sign up for this *Aliyat HaNo'ar*. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but, in any event, I went and I decided that I would join this group of children and we would travel [to Palestine].

Q: Didn't you have any relatives?

I didn't have any relatives that remained. The only relative that I had was my mother's sister who was in America, and somehow I managed to get in touch with her. Somebody gave me her address, and until today I still have contact with her. In Europe we were a very big family, and not only in Skala. But nobody remained. Maybe there were more distant relatives, but it was clear to me that nobody remained for me; that is to say, I didn't expect that I would meet any relatives.

I joined this group of children and they took us to Germany. Since all the children were in need of better [medical] care, they took us to a place in Germany that would be good for our recovery. The name of the place was St. Otylien. I think that it was once a hospital for the German army.

Q: Did you remain there a long time?

Half a year, or perhaps three-quarters of a year.

Q: And who took care of you there?

Already we were being cared for by UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency). We got all our equipment from them, including food and clothes. We were organized in a children's commune, as if we were on a kibbutz.

Q: But weren't you also being assisted by any Zionist organizations?

Of course by Zionist organizations. To be honest, every organization and every movement tried to assist, in order that when [we would] come to Palestine, this person would belong to *HaShomer Hatzair*, and this person would be a member of *Ma"pai*. We were in *Dror*. We had a counselor. We started to study a little, and everyone recovered well. We played some sports and went on some trips, and we waited until we would be brought to Palestine. We were constantly being promised that we would have certificates, but it took a long time. Finally, we moved to another place, mostly because it was becoming impossible to take care of us for a long time in St. Otylien. Occasionally there would be official visits in order to see if the people [in the hospital] really needed to be there. We were already healthy and organized, so they took us to another place, also in Germany. In this new place, there were a lot of youth organizations from all the different movements. And there we waited to immigrate to Palestine. Once again, we waited about half a year.

In total, I was in Germany one and a half years. Finally, we immigrated to Palestine.. They first took us, the entire group, to France. We were someplace close to Paris, not in some village. We left Paris and we went to Marseilles. Finally, we left France. I don't think it was from the port of Marseilles, but from some other port. It was an illegal immigration.

Q: Do you remember what year it was?

It was 1947 - the beginning of 1947. We traveled in a very small boat with a lot of people, until, as was often the case, the English caught us. They transferred us to their boat and they took us to Cyprus.

In Cyprus we were in an enclosed camp for seven or eight months. There was a youth facility there. Finally, we were able to immigrate legally. We joined Kibbutz Galil Yam, which is next to Herzliya. This was all part of the *Aliyat HaNoar* movement, and so, for half a day we studied and half a day we worked.

Q: How many years were you there?

We were there a little more than one year. Afterwards, in 1948, the war broke out. We were not all the same age, and some in the group who were a little older decided that they wanted to enlist in the army. If everyone wouldn't enlist together, they would enlist on

their own. I remember that representatives from the *Aliyat HaNoar* came and explained to us that we were still young and there was no reason to go into the army. We were not expected to enlist, and if we were needed, we would be drafted. In any event, some of the older people in the group did leave and enlisted in the army. Afterwards, the Kibbutz itself decided that, for purposes of maintaining the entire group, it was better that we all enlist. We were 16 and a half, 17 years old.

I think that I was 16 and a half when I enlisted. We were in the *Pal"mach*. The Kibbutz, in fact, sent us there because it would be easier to keep the entire group together. We were a division in a battalion of the *Pal"mach*. We participated in battles in the Negev, and, towards the end of the war, a little bit in the mountains of Jerusalem, until the war ended.

Afterwards, we had a choice. Whoever wanted was able to leave and to return [to the Kibbutz], and whoever didn't want to [return] was able to finish the army. The group, in fact, split up. Some chose to go to Kibbutz, and there they joined another group, and for a while they were on another Kibbutz. I stayed in the army until such time as I finished my army service.

Once in Israel I did manage to find some relatives. I stayed for a little while with some relatives, and I lived alone, with a cousin, who was also a refugee. I started to work in some factory and in the evenings I studied. I enrolled in night school in order to receive a high school diploma. I studied and I received a high school equivalency diploma.

I worked, saved a little money, and then I enrolled in the Technion [University]. I entered the Technion and then [my] life became somewhat more orderly. As a student, I was not allowed to work. I mostly studied, although I did work a little. In 1959, I finished the Technion, and from that time I have worked in my profession as a building engineer in Tel-Aviv.

I got married, and today we already have two children. I am continuing to work in my profession.

This testimony was recorded and edited by Miriam Tov
September, 1965.

Translated by Paul J. Blank
July, 1999

APPENDIX

A. List of Names in the Testimony of Menachem Bartel (Brottschneider)

- Avraham and Sheindel Brottschneider - The parents of [Menachem Bartel]. Murdered in the city of their birth, Skala.
- Hersz - The oldest brother of Menachem. Murdered in a camp in Lwow.
- Aron - The middle brother of Menachem. Captured towards the end of the war by the Hungarian army. His fate remains unknown.
- Edzin - The sister of Menachem. She was murdered by the Germans in Skala.
- Yegendorf - a Jewish family in Skala
- Schulz - A German; a guard on the staff of the German border patrol in Skala.

B. List of Places in the Testimony of Menachem Bartel (Brottschneider)

- Skala/Kbrucz - A city situated on the banks of the river Zhubrotz. In the area of Podola. From 1945, part of the Soviet Ukraine.
- Borszczow - A city which is presently part of the Soviet Ukraine. At one time part of Eastern Poland.
- Lwow
- Bytom
- Czertkow - A city which is presently part of the Soviet Ukraine. At one time part of Eastern Poland.
- St. Otylien - A German city in the area of Munich.
- Paris
- Marseille

Testimony of Menachem Bartal - Child Survivor of the Holocaust

Menachem Bartal (Brettshneider) was born in 1931 in Skala, Easter Galitzia to Avraham and Sheindel. He had two brothers, Hersz and Aron, and a sister, Edzia. Avraham worked as an egg seller.

When the Germans arrived, they established a border patrol and there was also a Ukranian police force. A Judenrat provided work details for the Germans. Hersz went to work for the Germans on a farm.

During the first pogram, the family hid in the cellar. Aron camouflaged the cellar and then hid behind the curtains and Hersz was hidden by the Germans he worked for. 80% of the Jews were taken to a work camp near Lvov.

An order was given for any Jews who remained to be sent to the ghetto in Borszczow. Because of Hersz' connections, Menachem's family was allowed to remain in Skala, but soon they were also ordered to go to Borszczow. The family decided that it would be safer to stay in hiding in Skala.

The family lived in abandoned houses. Because he was the youngest and most inconspicuous, Menachem became the contact person to buy things for the family. There was a Polish pharmacist who allowed Menachem to purchase medicaton when Aron was sick with typhus. On one occasion, Menachem was chased by Ukranian police on bicycles, and he managed to escape by jumping from a tall window.

When Ukranians came to the house they were hiding in, the family ran in different directions. Sheindel and Edzia were caught and killed. The rest of the family reassembled and hid in the attic of a different house.

Later, all the brothers and the father began to work for the Germans. During a search for a final deportation, Menachem hid in a loft with the Yegendorf family and another young girl. Hersz was most probably deported. When the search was over, Menachem located his father and Aron. When they were pursued, Avraham, in an attempt to make it safer for the boys, ran in a different location. He was caught, taken to the cemetery and shot.

Menachem and his brother lived in an attic and ate snow. The retreating Hungarian army caught Aron, and either turned him over to the Ukranian police or stabbed him to death in the street.

The Russians arrived and 80 Jews returned. Menachem traveled with the Yegendorfs to Bytom and then to St. Otylien where he was hospitalized for half a year. They were cared for by UNRRA.

Menachem made plans to go to Israel (Palestine) with Aliyat HaNoar. The ship sailed from Marseilles and was intercepted by the British. Menachem was sent to Cyprus for seven months, and then he was able to immigrate legally. He joined Kibbutz Glil Yam and served in the Pal'mach.

In Israel, Menachem found some relatives. He worked in a factory during the day, studied in the evening,and received a high school diploma. He enrolled in the Technion and became a building engineer in Tel Aviv. He married and had two children.

summarized and translated by Paul J Blank

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